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R. Harris
600.4.01.2 OSS: The
Secret History of
America's First
CIA

America's No. 1 spy corps

OSS: The Secret History of America's First Central Intelligence Agency. By R. Harris Smith. 458 pages. University of California Press. \$10.95.

The Office of Strategic Services, founded in the summer of 1941 by William J. Donovan, a New York lawyer and decorated veteran of World War I, became, through Donovan's friendship with President Roosevelt, the first fully developed espionage and intelligence-gathering organization in America's history. By the time of its dissolution in late 1945 it had enrolled some 13,000 people and conducted operations against the Axis powers over much of the globe.

The OSS was prodigiously publicized and its activities were lauded, condemned and otherwise proclaimed. The agency became politically controversial almost at once because of Donovan's insistence on the right man for a specific assignment regardless of his over-all background. As a consequence, various sections were quickly contaminated with communists or fellow-travelers, while other sections were manned by dedicated patriots.

Of all the books written about this nation's most glamorous federal arm, Mr. Smith's is the first to attempt a comprehensive sur-

vey of its structure and administration. But the result is no narrative of derring-do. Those coming to it for bravura revelations of cloak-and-dagger intrigue will be disappointed. Instead they will find a smoothly told, basically balanced assessment of the performance of a far-flung corporation.

The author, a former analyst with OSS's successor, the Central Intelligence Agency, and now a teacher of political science at the Berkeley campus of the University of California, is too young to have savored his subject at first hand. Nor has he been granted access to its still-classified archives. But he has been diligent in interviewing many of the group's former personnel, and he has compiled an extensive bibliography of published secondary sources, plus four manuscript collections. In treating complex topics—such as the Italian campaign, or the situation in partisan-riven Yugoslavia—he cuts a clean path through thickets of data. He has given his book a good index and 22 interesting illustrations.

Bares his teeth

On the minus side, the volume lacks any organizational charts or a table of illustrations. Dates are often hard to ascertain, and certain proper names would seem to have been needlessly veiled.

A far more fundamental deficiency is Mr. Smith's snug-fitting bias. Its orientation is, in a word, anti-establishment. Thus J. Edgar Hoover was "paranoiac." The Dies Committee was "infamous." OSS "blue-bloods" get a "safe post" at a London desk. Ho Chi Minh emerges as an amiable old party who would be just right to head the door-prize panel at your neighborhood bake sale.

In his last chapter, "OSS and CIA: The Espionage Gap," the author really bares his teeth. What then protrudes is a used set of New Left dentures, store bought. The thesis of this chapter is that the CIA is irredeemably conservative and, therefore, no good. Any author is entitled to a point of view, however blinkered, but what this concluding exercise in irrelevancy has to do with the book's subject remains moot.

The volume is, however, a useful one, and should stand as a searching contemplation from the academic cloister of a scintillating real-life phenomenon. While he still has the facts at his fingertips, Mr. Smith might try his hand at a biography of General Donovan. The only extended study, by the late Corey Ford (1970), is not adequate.

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